

# THE TAUNTON BAY STUDY

## *A pilot project in collaborative bay management*

### Local Input Key to Better Management

In April, the clock started running on a year-long study to find ways of improving management of how people use Taunton Bay. Such uses include fishing, research, aquaculture, education, monitoring, recreation, conservation, and riparian land ownership.

Friends of Taunton Bay has received a \$20,000 grant from the State Planning Office to coordinate the study. At the end of a year, FTB is to report recommendations derived from this community-wide project to the Maine Land and Water Resources Council, which is conducting a two-year search for ways to improve use management of Maine's bays and coastal waters.

The study will explore means for incorporating local knowledge and values in the bay management process. It focuses on five areas of activity:

- **Outreach** to those who use the bay in various ways, sharing information with them, and learning about their values and concerns
- **Monitoring** the short-term health and long-term environmental integrity of the bay as told by a selection of marine ecosystem indicators
- **Assessing** local fisheries' contribution to the regional economy in comparison with that of other sectors such as construction and tourism
- **Mapping** local information to keep users up-to-date about the bay and its watershed, and to aid collaborative decision making
- **Suggesting** a range of options for making bay uses sustainable through broad public participation and by

sharing detailed information about the bay.

A coordinating committee made up of two members from each working group helps keep the different areas of activity focused and in touch with one another.



Taunton Bay hosts a number of small fishing operations.

Taunton Bay is well suited for this study in having clear boundaries, a compact size, relatively few users, and a recent history of intensive research. A separate pilot project is being conducted on a broader scale in Muscongus Bay.

A "town meeting" enabling different users of Taunton Bay to share their concerns and look for ways to address them will be held the evening of Wednesday, July 27. Time and place will be announced in local papers. The Tuesday, July 19 meeting of Friends of Taunton Bay will present The Taunton Bay Study in detail, and report on progress made as of that date. This will be held at the Franklin Community Center on Route 182, 7:30 p.m. The public is invited to both meetings.

See [www.maine.gov/dmr/baystudy/baystudy.htm](http://www.maine.gov/dmr/baystudy/baystudy.htm) for additional background information. □

### Marine Use Sustainability

One goal of The Taunton Bay Study is to provide detailed information meant to promote sustainable uses of the bay. This emphasis on stewardship is intended to further discussion and cooperation between users with very different



Kayaker at Tidal Falls.

hopes for how their children might use the bay forty years from now.

Sustainability goes to the heart of the resource idea: a resource is a source users can return to again and again. But over the years, we

sometimes come to think of one species of marine life or another as "the resource" itself. This shifts attention away from the conditions responsible for that species' abundance to what we can take out of those conditions. Sooner or later, our take declines and the bounty we once took for granted no longer exists. Cod, halibut, urchins, scallops—we all know the story.

Since natural marine systems are self-regulating under a wide range of conditions, they generally work best when not pushed too hard or too far. Which means taking from them only what they can spare on a sustainable basis.

Sustainability, then, depends on our being good stewards of the habitats making our various uses possible in the first place. The bay can produce only so much. It is up to us to suit our activities to the bay's level of sustainable production, not to ask the bay to give us all that we want. □

## Septic Fields and Buffer Strips

Bays are the receiving waters for seepage and runoff flowing from surrounding uplands—and for the chemicals dissolved in them. What sorts of chemicals? Fertilizers spread on lawns and agricultural lands. Pesticides, herbicides, fungicides. Gasoline dumped on woodland duff. Petroleum products running off roads into drainage ditches. Chemicals leaching out of septic systems whether in good order or bad. And excess medicines and household chemicals poured down the drain. Water runs downhill to the bay, which has no choice but to receive whatever cargo it brings with it.

Bays, then, are the ultimate sinks where chemicals go when we apply them excessively, or want to get rid of them. In the case of Taunton Bay, when chemicals are thrown away in the great triangle from Waltham to Township 10 to the Hancock side of Tidal Falls, that is where they end up. With perhaps dire consequences for the waters we would prefer to think of as pristine.

Which is the reason for buffer strips of native vegetation along the shores of fresh and salt water. Native plants thrive within the range of conditions typically provided by the local climate and soils, with no need for pesticides, fertilizers, and all the rest. In fact they absorb the chemical burden seeping past their roots, and, if the buffer strip is dense enough, wide enough, they prevent that burden from making conditions harder for marine life in streams, wetlands, ponds, and bays. Shoreland zoning requires a 75-foot set-back—not for lawns and exotic flowers—but for native plants to stand as a protective buffer to keep harmful chemicals out of such waters.



DMR horseshoe crab research.

Stewardship, then, is not something for just those out on the water to be concerned with. It is the flip-side of land use and ownership anywhere within the watershed of Taunton Bay. As more and more people ask the watershed to accommodate them, the opportunity to practice good stewardship of this special place on the Maine coast can only increase. And beyond the opportunity, the obligation to act with the long-term welfare of the bay in mind. □

## Ecosystem-based Management

The Taunton Bay Study hopes to turn ecosystem-based management from words into action. It aims to respond to the state's challenges of: improving marine resource management in Maine, resolving conflicts between users, and bringing new information and a diversity of perspectives to bear on bay management issues within the five areas of activity: 1) outreach, 2) monitoring, 3) assessing, 4) mapping, and 5) suggesting options.

How, then, does ecosystem-based management differ



From Taunton Bay looking south to MDI.

from traditional management? Conventional management tracks landings species-by-species, while; ecosystem-based management looks to the health of the system making all landings possible. People, of course, are part of every ecosystem these

days, so the bulk of an ecosystem-based approach is spent monitoring how people interact with species of marine life. "The goal of ecosystem-based management," according to the Scientific Consensus Statement on Marine Ecosystem-Based Management, "is to maintain an ecosystem in a



Seals, too, consume Taunton Bay fish.

healthy, productive and resilient condition so that it can provide the services humans want and need."

Ecosystem-based management, that is, reflects how we practice

stewardship to encourage a marine ecosystem to regulate itself in a resilient and productive manner for the benefit of all. □

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Your input is important to this study. We invite you to share any questions, comments, or suggestions you may have with us.

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